

ENGINEERING HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Proposal to Nominate

Sydney's First Gasworks

as an Item of Engineering Heritage Interest

Item Name:	Sydney's First Gasworks		
Other/Former Names:	Millers Point Gasworks		
Locality:	Millers Point, now Barangaroo		
Address:	Gas Lane, Millers Point, Sydney		
Co-ordinates	Lat: -33.8621486404692 Lon: 151.20353150322845		
Current Owner:	Unknown		
Original Owner:	Australian Gaslight Company		
Current use:	Apartment and office buildings		
Former use:	Gas manufacturing		
Proposed use:	Apartment and office buildings		
Item Condition:	The only remains are the former main office building and the former Carburetted Water Gas Plant building. They have been re-purposed and are in good condition.		
Designer:	Unknown		
Builder:	Managed by James Bryan, "a gentleman of great experience and ability in Gas Engineering".		
Started:	1837	Completed:	1841
History:	<p>Australia's second oldest company, The Australian Gas Light Company (AGL), was established by private interests in New South Wales on 7 September 1837 to light the streets of Sydney with coal gas.¹ "... little more than twenty years have elapsed since gas-lights were first introduced into the leading provincial towns of England, and not more than five-and-twenty since they were brought into London itself. And now they have reached the antipodes!"²</p> <p>The gasworks was built on land in Jenkins Street on the foreshore of east Darling Harbour at Millers Point, between 1837 and 1840. The works at the start were naturally small, Sydney at that time having a population of only about 25,000 inhabitants.³ Gas was manufactured from coal from the Hunter Valley, which was shipped in from Newcastle by colliers known as the 'Sixty Milers'.¹</p> <p>The first gas street lights were turned on, on 24 May 1841 to celebrate the birthday of Queen Victoria – the directors "... authorised the supply of gas for that one night to be free of charge"³.</p> <p>By March 1843 there were 165 gas lamps in the city - 14 Government lights, 11 Corporation lamps, 106 Publicans' lights, and 34 Private lamps. The rest of the people used traditional oil lamps which were to remain as the predominant source of lighting both industrially and domestically until</p>		

ENGINEERING HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

	<p>the arrival of electricity.¹</p> <p>... the Australian Gas Light Company (AGL) which began raising capital in 1836, received legislative consent in 1837 and imported its first consignment of manufacturing equipment in May 1839. Lacking colonial expertise, the company's directors, who included the Commanding Royal Engineer Major George Barney [Captain in 1836, promoted to Brevet Major in 1837]⁶, requested "working drawings of the gas works with the most explicit instructions for...guidance in their erection". Fortunately, when it arrived, the equipment was accompanied by Mr. James Bryan, "a gentleman of great experience and ability in Gas Engineering in all its departments" who became Sydney's first gas engineer. Under his direction, AGL built a small works on less than an acre of land on the eastern shores of Darling Harbour, a site still marked by the Company's first office and store which stands at the end of Gas Lane towards the northern end of Kent Street.²</p> <p>The Millers Point Gasworks - the first in the southern hemisphere, operated from 1841 until 1921. Operations were cut short due to an outbreak of bubonic plague, which necessitated the construction of a rat-proof wall running along the wharf and what became the thoroughfare of [the new] Hickson Road. Hickson Road cut through the Gasworks site to open traffic into the peninsula. Upon the facility's closure, the operations of the Australian Gas Light (AGL) Company were transferred to the Sydney suburb of Mortlake.⁵</p> <p>Almost a century after the decommissioning of the Millers Point Gasworks, the site is [at the time of writing] being remediated due to the revitalisation of the area now known as Barangaroo. The gasworks spanned sections four and five of the new Barangaroo development (the final area to be redeveloped) and buildings 30-38 on Hickson Road. These buildings include the site of the former Carburetted Water Gas Plant and the Main AGL Office, as well as '30 The Bond', a five-star green-rated office complex, which was built in 2004 atop the remains of the former main gasholder, and 'The Bond Apartments'.</p> <p>The commemoration of the gasworks' industrial legacy at Millers Point selectively features aspects of its former industrial history, with certain materials exposed for their historical aesthetic qualities (such as the sandstone wall).⁵</p>
<p>Description:</p>	<p>The first colonial gas works comprised a retort room and chimney, purifying room, forge, wharf and two gasholders. The retort room contained cast-iron horizontal retorts about seven feet long, stopped at one end and sealed with a gas-proof door at the other, and built in benches of five to seven above a producer fire which was fed at intervals with coke left after the coal was carbonised. The purifying room contained a tank of limewater through which the gas was bubbled to remove the hydrogen sulphide or rotten egg gas. In between these two rooms was a condenser, a system of tubes through which the gas was passed to liquefy the other byproducts of tar and ammonia. These were collected in barrels and as there was little demand for them, sad to report, they were emptied into the harbour. Ash from the producer fires was also thrown away.²</p> <p>Because of the imbalance between the rates of gas production and consumption, gasholders were always a necessary adjunct to a gasworks, storing the gas produced by the 24-hour operation of the retorts to be burned at night in the gas lamps.²</p>

ENGINEERING HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Significance:	The Australian Gas Light Company's growth helped to drive the development of Sydney, both through providing access to energy and the associated industrial infrastructure and developments that shaped our suburbs. ⁴		
Webpage Summary:	<p>The Australian Gas Light Company (AGL) was established on 7 September 1837, and built Sydney's first gasworks on land in Jenkins Street on the foreshore of east Darling Harbour at Millers Point. At the time, Sydney had a population of only about 25,000 inhabitants.</p> <p>Gas was manufactured from coal from the Hunter Valley, which was shipped in from Newcastle by colliers known as the 'Sixty Milers'.¹</p> <p>Gasmaking equipment was fully imported. Lacking colonial expertise, the company's directors, who included the Commanding Royal Engineer Major George Barney [Captain in 1836, promoted to Brevet Major in 1837]⁶, requested "working drawings of the gas works with the most explicit instructions for guidance in their erection". When the equipment arrived it was accompanied by James Bryan who had great experience and ability in gas engineering and who became Sydney's first gas engineer.</p> <p>The first gas street lights were turned on in 24 May 1841 to celebrate the birthday of Queen Victoria.</p> <p>The Millers Point Gasworks operated until 1921. Operations were cut short due to an outbreak of the bubonic plague, which necessitated the construction of a rat-proof wall running along the wharf and what became the thoroughfare of [the new] Hickson Road, which cut through the Gasworks site. Upon the facility's closure, the operations of the Australian Gas Light (AGL) Company were transferred to the Sydney suburb of Mortlake.⁵</p>		
Engineering Theme:	Secondary Industry, Manufacturing, Gas		
Heritage Listing:	Unable to determine		
References/Sources:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Forgotten Sydney</i> https://www.visitsydneyaustralia.com.au/gasworks.html 2. <i>Sydney – from settlement to city: Gas in Sydney</i> by Rosemary Broomham. 3. Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser Saturday 16 April 1898, The Australian Gaslight Company, Sydney, N.S.W. Diamond Jubilee, 1837-1897. <i>An Historical Sketch by the Secretary.</i> 4. <i>Sydney's Gas History</i> by Lisa Murray. https://dictionaryofsydney.org/blog/sydneys_gas_history 5. <i>Industrial Signatures: Sydney's Gasworks</i> by Elizabeth Duncan, November 2019. https://infrastructuralinequalities.net/issue-1/industrial-signatures-sydneys-gasworks/ 6. <i>George Barney RE (1792 - 1862), First Colonial Engineer</i> by R. Sutton. The Engineering Conference, 2-6 April, 1984, Brisbane. 		
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EHA Branch:	Sydney	Nomination Date:	25 January 2024

ENGINEERING HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM



Gas works, Millers Point. 1873, Samuel Elyard.
State Library of NSW



Gasworks, Millers Point C1870.
State Library of NSW



Gasworks, Millers Point.
State Library of NSW

